



Check it

Panel Assessment of whether the publications of the Divisions of the Methodist Church are taking into account the presence of ethnic minorities within the Church, and a Checklist for Editors and Authors.

FOREWORD

Many local Methodist churches serve communities in which there are few people whose cultural background is predominantly Asian, African or Caribbean. Naturally the membership of these churches reflects the locality which they serve. However, in many other areas, indeed a growing number, there are genuinely multi-racial communities. Within them, Methodist churches have people of races other than White British as members, stewards, local preachers and ministers, and they find that the life of their churches has been deeply enriched in this way. Their mission is to a multi-racial community, as indeed the mission of the whole Methodist Church is to a multi-racial country. The literature produced by the Church plainly should reflect this fact. In order to help the people who produce the Church's literature take account of this, the Ethnic Minorities in Methodism Working Group asked a multi-racial group of people in Bristol to prepare a set of guidelines which could be made freely available to any who were willing to use them. In order to prepare the guidelines the Bristol group first examined the literature already being prepared by the Divisions—not in order to pass judgment on it, but to learn from it the points that need to be watched.

We commend this review and these guidelines to you and hope that you will find them helpful. If there are any points which have been overlooked we shall be very happy to be told about them.

Jeffrey W Harris—Chairman
Albert W Mosley—Convenor
Ethnic Minorities in Methodism Working Group

THE PANEL

Miss Florence Cleaver

retired missionary (Burma), ex Women's Work President, member of the Asia Advisory Group of the Overseas Division.

Miss G Betty Hares
(convenor)

ex Secretary of the Overseas Division and editor of NOW. Chairman, Bristol Council of Christian Churches Race Relations Working Party.

The Rev. Arthur Howell

ex Circuit Minister, Totterdown Methodist Church, which has a sizeable Asian British membership. Secretary of the BCCC Race Relations Working Party.

Mr Sadegh Massey

Businessman, Church Steward, member of the BCCC Race Relations Working Party.

Mr Paul Bhale Rae

ex teacher, Communion Steward, member of the BCCC Race Relations Working Party.

The Rev. Ivan Selman

Minister at Westbury Park Methodist Church Bristol, ex Chairman, BCCC Race Relations Working Party, member of the Division of Social Responsibility Standing Committee on Community Relations.

Dr Edwina Sherrington

Bristol Churches' Liaison Officer (FE) undertaking a three-year research project on appropriate ministries among students in technical colleges.

METHOD OF WORKING

Material from the Divisions was sent to members of the Panel, who examined and reported on it either in writing or verbally at a meeting of the Panel at Westbury Park Methodist Church on June 4th, 1983.

MATERIAL EXAMINED

A representative spread of material from each of the Divisions was examined.

REPORT

The Panel judged that it would be inappropriate and unnecessary to make line by line comments on the material, and considered that it would be more helpful to list the main points of criticism and then offer suggestions for improvement.

GENERAL

As expected, we did not find in any of the publications evidence of overt racism. We were very favourably impressed with a great deal of the material and of some publications we had little or no criticism to make. Comments on this material are of the following kind:

"... there were plenty of references to communities and how they are made up, good photographs of 'natural' activities being done by blacks and whites, good analysis of problems in communities. Minorities fitted easily into much of this work."

"... realistic and compassionate analysis of the causes and classes of unemployment. Minorities would certainly feel that their problems were recognised and fully accommodated."

"Nobody would feel excluded by either the language or the descriptions..."

"... excellent material not written *about* ethnic minorities but *with* them..."

"I cannot fault this material..."

Nevertheless, the overall impression of our Methodist publications taken en bloc received by all the members of the Panel, was that of a WASP society: white, affluent, suburban, professional; and *this constitutes our major criticism*. Reports from panel members on a variety of literature from all the Divisions include the following comments:

"All the names given in examples and illustrations were rather English and rather middle class (no Le Roy or Delroy or Wagner or Darrent). I found no name which I associate with other social groupings."

"... its whole atmosphere is that of the middle class white Methodist—and often the 'family' feels like the captive audience of an English public school..."

"I read them as an expatriate, formerly working class Scot. I found virtually nothing which would help anyone other than a white middle class English Methodist who was probably already a teacher. The language seemed geared to that kind of understanding..."

"... the overall impression is that they have been written by white, middle class people for white middle class people."

"I concurred in the comments from other people about the WASP orientation of most of our literature..."

"White mono-cultural areas/churches are often assumed in statements such as: 'Arrange visits to multi-racial areas'. What about people *in* those areas?"

"Ethnic minorities are frequently spoken of in the third person—a distinct feeling of 'them and us'. 'Us' often seems to assume white readers in statements like 'some already living among us . . .' (of people of other cultures)."

"... there is the *impression* that the poor, the black, are overseas. Black there, white here."

"There is the overall impression of suburbia (white and middle class); church design, the occupations mentioned, all contribute to this impression. There is the assumption that church music means an organ. Congregations are typecast in some cases: 'Young wives nowadays have very smart and comfortable homes . . .' Styles of worship are often assumed."

"Occasionally there seems to be surprise that black people/children in the Church are participating in normal church activity. Why does a statement about multi-racial churches 'Almost all of them have JMA collectors!' have to have an exclamation mark against it?"

"Prayers of Confession are of a 'blanket' variety, eg: 'for our overeating'. All the prayers seem to assume white suburban affluence . . . Why do we *pray for* single mothers, and *give thanks for* married love?"

"... they begin to feel rather 'academic' and would probably not have much appeal to anyone except people (white) in the social services, or industrial chaplains, or rather specialist church groups. The impression left at the end is rather that the initiative will come from articulate professionals in the church, and anyone outside these groups would feel that the papers were not really addressed to them."

To these comments we would like to add that not only did we think that the material did not reflect a *multi-ethnic* society, but also that it did not reflect a *British white multi-cultural* society.

PICTURES, CARTOONS, ARTWORK

We are surprised that the Methodist Church/National Christian Education Council Project and Scripture Examination should produce such a white European Jesus!

There is a fair amount of what we felt to be tokenism: very few *majority* black groups; no pictures of people of ethnic minorities in teaching or leadership roles (except overseas).

In some literature, eg some of the Home Mission Reports, pictures which showed multi-ethnic activity only appeared with articles covering or including multi-racial or inner city work. This indicated to us an attitude in the church which separates areas of ethnic minority concern from the rest of the work of the church. We think it would be more helpful

if the whole of the work of the church could be recognised as multi-ethnic and if ways could be found of reflecting this in our publications. Reports might include contributions from people in other groups, cultural and racial, expressing their own views.

Are there no aged black people in need of a home? If so they do not appear in the very good Methodist Homes for the Aged material.

Some **cartoons** caricature black children/people (and white people too in some cases), and in some cases they compare unfavourably with cartoons of white people.

Logos are powerful communicators. The **Talking Point** logo has a white man and a white child.

Artwork. The message conveyed by artwork can be very subtle and its dangers and possibilities should be fully recognised; again, it is a powerful medium. The artwork on a Youth Exchange poster seems to say 'White exchanging with Black', whereas the teams going from Britain are in fact multi-ethnic.

There is also some **stereotyping**. One comment is, "People of ethnic minorities could say, 'We are not like that picture!' White people could say, 'We do not wear pyjamas out of doors!'"

WORDS

One problem which cannot be overstated is that language is constantly changing and its current usage and understanding needs constantly to be checked. Words which were acceptable yesterday may not be acceptable today. The criteria for use must always be whether or not they are acceptable at the present time. Some examples, found in the literature examined, of words which can arouse deep emotion today in ethnic minority communities are 'immigrants', 'problems', 'law and order', 'culture conflict', 'Third World', 'the size of the problem', 'illegal immigrants', '... our jobs that they take'. The use of the words and colours 'black' and 'white' are not always used in a sensitive way. (We were surprised to see that a poster from Haiti used as an illustration in NOW showed only Jesus in a white robe, and the disciples wearing distinctly colonial style 'topees'!)

OPPORTUNITIES MISSED

Some members of the Panel felt that the sins were of omission rather than commission. Opportunities provided by the subject of the publication were not taken up. Some examples from the panel reports are:

1. "In the section on 'Community' in **Face to Face**, more could have been done to bring out the wealth and richness of the resources within a congregation. Suggestions in the section that 'ordinary' congregations could in themselves be a resource were not developed and no clues were provided as to how people could be persuaded to share their special and varied (potential) contributions."

2. The issue of NOW on **People Coming . . . People Going** missed the opportunity to talk about ethnic minorities in Britain and to include a contribution from them, especially in view of new immigration laws just passed at the time.
3. Statements such as "Christianity came to Sierra Leone with European traders" and references to slavery provided an opportunity to create awareness and to educate which was not taken up. (The Panel member who made this comment paid tribute to the material, but felt that much background knowledge to statements such as those quoted is often assumed.)
4. The theological and biblical basis for the Church's stand against racism does not appear to be stated in the very excellent material from the Division of Social Responsibility on racism, or in the support material to the **Mission Alongside the Poor Report**.
5. People of ethnic minorities find it difficult to understand why the leaders of overseas churches are often referred to in the text of the **Prayer Manual**, but the lists of personnel refer only to expatriate missionary workers and not to the indigenous leaders. Also in relation to the **Prayer Manual**, there is no reflection of the fact that some of the relatives of those for whom we are asked to pray are in this country and are themselves praying for them.
6. Literature produced by the Division of Property missed the opportunity to encourage churches to explore the ethnic resources of a neighbourhood and the worship/architectural style/music of other cultures when putting up a new church or adapting an old one.
7. **Action Plan for the Churches** missed the opportunity to include action from the young, the black, etc, to other unemployed people or groups. The remedies were rather too abstract, and again, opportunities were lost, rather than there being anything definite or deliberate . . .
8. An opportunity was missed in the **Prayer and Fasting** leaflets, which contain much valuable material, to draw on the experience and practice of people of other faiths, and other Christian traditions. The leaflets could have been enriched considerably by, for example, reference to the worship and devotional practices of the Orthodox churches.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In making recommendations we recognise first the validity of producing special material for special groups, but unless for some reason particular ethnic groups are being addressed, we think that all literature should recognise the fact that in our society today, the readership is likely to be multi-ethnic. Second, we recognise the extreme difficulty of producing

Divisional literature which speaks to the whole constituency and which reflects the variety within it. Most writers and editors have to have a readership 'eye level' in view and aim their material at it; but we seriously wonder whether it always has to be white suburbia. Probably a better question to ask is what can be done to overcome the monoculture impression we have received as we have read the publications. We would like to suggest a number of guidelines, and a checklist.

1. Church literature, perhaps above all, should provide people of ethnic minorities with a 'voice' which at present they feel they only find, for example, in publications of the Institute of Race Relations and other secular and community literature.

One of the two Asians on the Panel, Mr Paul Bhale Rao, commented: "We would like to have the opportunity to tell people why we are here, what we feel and think about the problems we face, why white British Christians see Asians in church here in Britain. We would like to feel that the literature produced is helping us to face our difficulties in a sympathetic manner."

2. There should be less concern about editorial niceties: 'correct' English grammar etc, and more concern to allow people from a wide variety of cultures—white British as well as black British to express themselves in their own way. We believe they have important things to say and that the Church is not hearing them.
3. People of ethnic minorities/other social and cultural groupings should be included in literature planning and editorial groups.
4. In all literature and in all aspects of the life of our Church the presence of ethnic minorities in our communities should be taken into account. This will mean that care is taken not to refer to people as 'them' or to multi-racial areas as though they were a foreign mission field! It will mean trying to find inclusive modes of expression, even if these are sometimes clumsy; for example: "those of us who are black and those of us who are white", or "those of us whose cultural heritage is . . . and those of us whose . . ."
5. 'Affirmative Action' (this term in David Sheppard's **Bias to the Poor** is to be preferred to the better-known 'positive discrimination') should be encouraged in church literature, demonstrating the desire of the Church that people of ethnic minorities are needed as candidates for the ministries of the Church and to participate in programmes/projects set up by the Divisions.
6. Great care should be taken to avoid the use of emotive words and phrases which would not be used by or are offensive to people of ethnic minorities.
7. The gap between home and overseas should be closed. Opportunities should be taken to make white British people aware of their history and its results in the wider world as well as in Britain today. Care should be taken not to give the impres-

sion that some things only happen overseas. The rich are not only 'here'; the poor are not only 'there'; there are 'exciting' things happening in Britain as well as overseas. A linking of situations 'there' and 'here' would be helpful in our view.

8. Pictures should as far as possible reflect the multi-cultural nature of British society and of the Methodist Church, and that people of other ethnic groups are to be found throughout the professional life of the nation and in all sections of society.

Nevertheless, **tokenism**, the inclusion of a black face because we think it should be there, is not acceptable. If there *are* no people from ethnic minorities in the church institutions and situations being illustrated and written about, then perhaps that is saying something about the Church and its institutions rather than about the literature!

Nor are **stereotyping** and **blanket generalisations** acceptable. Stereotypes must be challenged by, for example, a picture showing one or two whites among many blacks, or a large black man with his arm round a small white boy, or by a picture of a black teacher in a white class, etc.

9. What applies to photographs applies even more to cartoons. White British cartoons, one of the basic features of which is caricature, are not always understood by people of other ethnic and cultural backgrounds, who may be more used to the folk story or proverb to make a point. Cartoons can be dangerous and damaging to relationships, and we judge that it is better to be over-sensitive in this area than under-sensitive. When something is deliberately drawn that way and is not acceptable or is a caricature, particularly when it compares unfavourably in the eyes of some people with drawings of white people, it is more difficult to understand than something in a photograph which may at least reflect the reality of a situation even if it is difficult to swallow!
10. Background information to overseas churches should be orientated to the viewpoint of the country concerned rather than that of a white British statistical year book, for example. Such information can be used to build awareness and to educate about the presence of ethnic minorities in our midst. (We realise that this is not an easy exercise, but think that an attempt at it should be made.)
11. In writing about overseas areas and in prayer material for the world, more sensitivity needs to be given to the fact that there are people from those areas among us, using the material and praying for the countries from which they or their relatives have come, or in which their relatives still live.
12. Programme material should, wherever possible, draw on the resources of ethnic minorities, and/or encourage groups and churches to do so.

CHECKLIST

FOR EDITORS AND WRITERS

(We recommend the **CRITERIA FOR THE EVALUATION OF RACISM** in textbooks and children's literature formulated by an international working party of the 1978 World Council of Churches Workshop on Racism in Children's and School Textbooks, held at Arnoldshain in the FDR. Many of these criteria would apply to adult literature as well. Also: **Racist Textbooks** by Chris Proctor (NUS 1975, 45p) and the guidelines put out by the Centre for Urban Educational Studies (34 Aberdeen Park, London N5).)

A CHECKLIST

1. Are there people of ethnic minorities involved in the planning of your publication?
2. Have you invited people of ethnic minorities to contribute their own views/experiences of the situation/subject with which you are dealing?
3. Are you writing *about* people rather than allowing/enabling them to write about themselves?
4. Are you giving background information from a white British geographical/historical perspective exclusively, or from that of the people about whom you are writing or for whom you are writing?
5. Are you using language which is inclusive or exclusive? Does your writing reflect the inclusive nature of the Christian gospel, that we are all one in Christ?
6. Are you encouraging 'affirmative action' which will enable people of ethnic minorities to contribute/participate in the programme/project/ministry about which you are writing?
7. Because language is a living thing, word meanings are constantly changing. Does the material contain words or phrases which have become offensive to people of ethnic minorities or which suggest a two-value system? Examples of these are:

'Coloured' to describe . . . South African connotations.

'Black' associated with 'evil', 'bad' etc, and 'white' associated with 'good', 'pure' etc.

'Problems' applied to multi-ethnic areas and not to all-white areas.

'Culture conflict' applied only to inner city/multi-ethnic areas.

'Inner city' used in such a way as to suggest that those who live there are inferior to people living in other areas, or are 'problems' or need to be helped.

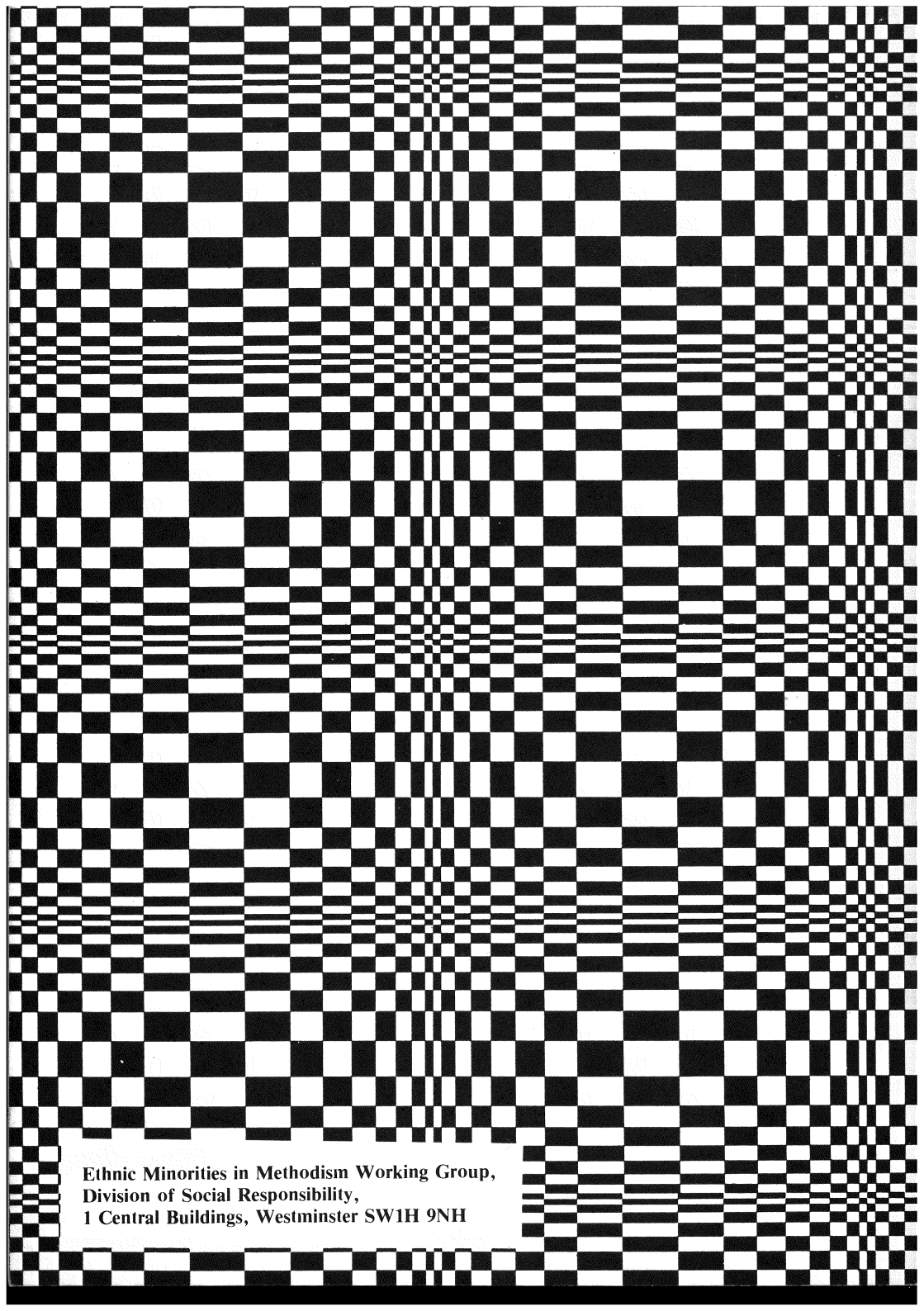
'Third World' applied to a certain group of countries with the implication that they need to be 'helped' and are thus inferior. The terms 'North-South', 'non-aligned' where appropriate are useful alternatives.

- 'Developing' countries with the implication that Europe, or European churches are developing them, or that their cultures are undeveloped.
- 'Developing' with the implication that Europe (or European churches) are 'developing' the 'Third World'.

TWO-VALUE SYSTEM (some examples)

- 'Terrorists' to describe African liberation movements, 'guerillas' or 'freedom fighters' to describe forces fighting against governments supported by European countries.
- 'Killed' in a European context, 'massacred' in an African/Asian context.
- 'Home' to describe where we live in Britain. 'Hut' to describe the home of an African.
- 'Revolution' or 'insurrection'.
- 'King' or 'Chief'.
- 'Settlers' (Europeans going to live overseas); 'immigrants' (people from overseas coming to live in Britain).

8. Do the pictures employ **tokenism**—the arbitrary, solitary and standardised black face or character? **stereotyping**—defined by David Milner in **Children and Race** as 'the attribution of supposed characteristics of the whole group to all its individual members'?
9. Do the pictures show only whites in dominant, active roles?
10. Do you *have* to use a cartoon? If so, have you considered fully its subtleties and checked that they are not likely to give offence to people who do not have a white British understanding of cartoons? (Guidance from people of ethnic minorities involved in the production of material is helpful here, and in most of the other points in this checklist.)
11. Is the historical background to people of ethnic minorities in our Church taken into account in preparing worship/prayer material? Are you taking into account the fact that there is a large variety of cultures both minority and majority in our Church?
12. Does the publication illustrate white European values, development, theology, life-styles and institutions *exclusively*? as superior *always*? as the norm and model for all cultures? Is consideration being given to the fact that we live in a changing society?



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